

# THE WALLS

It was a great land that rolled out so softly and easily. And in one part of the great land, there lived many fishermen. They were the men of the West. They fished with ease, and they hooked and landed a great many fish—bass, trout, sunfish, and others—for the waters that ran through the fishermen's land were rich in the things the fish found to be good. But the woods in the land of the fishermen had few big animals, for the woods were not rich in the things the big animals found to be good. And yet each fisherman was happy in his part of the land; for not only did he do well in his fishing, but he could also work close to his home and his family. And the fisherman loved his fishing, his land, his home, and his family.

And in another part of the great land, there lived many hunters. They were the men of the East. They hunted with ease, and they stalked and killed a great many animals—bear, deer, moose, and others—for the woods in the hunters' part of the land were rich in the things the animals found to be good. But the waters in the land of the hunters had few fish, for the waters were not rich in the things the fish found to be good. And yet each hunter was happy in his part of the land; for not only did he do well in his hunting, but he could also work close to his home and his family. And the hunter loved his hunting, his land, his home, and his family.

Then one day the hunters and their families heard that they could get good flesh that was not from their animals. Fish were what they wanted, for to eat fish was a treat in the land of the hunters. So the hunters would walk a long way west to the land of the fishermen. And when they neared one of the rivers that teemed with fish, the hunters would see fishermen walking about and tossing many of their fish toward the crowds of gulls cackling on the shore; for the fishermen wished to sell only the best of their fish. And many of their fish would never be the right kinds of fish to sell.

But the hunters would watch and would wonder why so many fish were left to flip and flop about on a beach. And the hunters would say to themselves, "It is not good that the fishermen leave their fish on the shore for the gulls. Our families could be eating those fish. And in the evenings, when the gulls fly home to their islands, as people say they do, the fish that are left will begin to rot. But in our part of the land, in the East, we treasure our few fish." And each hunter would also say to himself, "Is my family not worth more to the fishermen than a flock of cackling gulls?"

But the hunters would not tell the fishermen how they might improve themselves, for the hunters thought that giving them advice would offend the fishermen. Each hunter wished to maintain trade between hunter and fisherman, for the hunter had a family to feed. And so each hunter would walk home to the East, toting his fish in a sack, and he would then say to his wife and his children, "I do not understand the ways of the fishermen. I am glad I am not one of *them*."

And so each hunter would not return to the land of the fishermen, except when he wanted fish. And the hunters all joked of the ways of the fishermen, for *hunting* was surely not a funny thing.

And while the hunters and their families liked flesh that was not just from their animals, the fishermen and their families wished for more than the flesh they got just from their fish. They wanted to eat big animals, for to eat big animals was a treat in the land of the fishermen. So the fishermen would walk a long way east to the land of the hunters. And when they neared the edge of the woods that teemed with big animals, the fishermen would see hunters heaving many smelly parts of their big animals toward the crowds of pouncing vultures, for the hunters only wanted to sell the best parts of their

animals. And many parts of their animals would never be the right kinds of parts to sell.

So the fishermen would watch and would wonder why so many once-good parts from so many big animals were allowed to go bad and be thrown aside for so many mere vultures. The fishermen would look at the bloody sight and say to themselves, “It is not good that the hunters leave many parts of their big animals by the edge of the woods, for the vulgar vultures are gorging themselves on animal parts that our families once could have eaten. And in our part of the land, in the West, we treasure every part of our few big animals.” And each fisherman would also say to himself, “Is my family not worth more to the hunters than a vile horde of vultures?”

But the fishermen would not tell the hunters how they might improve themselves, for the fishermen thought that giving them advice would offend the hunters. Each fisherman wished to maintain trade between hunter and fisherman, for the fisherman had a family to feed. And so each fisherman would walk home to the West, toting his favourite meats in a sack, and he would then say to his wife and his children, “I do not understand the ways of the hunters. I am glad I am not one of *them*.”

And so each fisherman would not return to the land of the hunters, except when he wanted animals. And the fishermen all joked of the ways of the hunters, for *fishing* was surely not a funny thing.

And so for many years the hunters and the fishermen carried on like this.

And then one warm spring evening—with the globe’s moon high, bright, and full—there was great joking among all of the fishermen in their part of the land and among all of the hunters in theirs. Each fisherman chuckled at how he could not understand the ways of the men who wasted good food. And each hunter chuckled about this, too.

So each group decided that the other group was a gang of fools. And there arose in both groups the fear that the foolish group would one day come and do foolish things to the other group; for if each group could see good food being treated badly, might good people one day get treated badly, too?

And so on the next moonlit night, one fisherman got an idea. He said, "Listen to me. Here is a plan. Let us use the bright darkness of these moonlit nights, and let us begin to build for ourselves a great wall. It shall be a wall to separate our wise ways from the foolish ways of the hunters. Yes, let us build a great wall, here in the West, so that those foolish hunters will not try to take over our part of the land. Or are we to let them come in, and let them take us by surprise, and let them leave us to rot in our very own land?"

And many of the fishermen liked the idea of building a great wall. But some of the fishermen said they did not, for how then would there be trade? How would a man keep his family well fed? So all of the fishermen agreed that a few great doors would be part of the wall and that some men could still carry on trade at the doors.

So on the next moonlit night, the fishermen began to build what they did not know could be the end of the world. It was to be a wall that would run far to the north and far to the south.

And as time passed, the wall grew so well that word of its growth reached the leaders of the hunters in the East. And the leaders said, "Let us go see this wall."

So when the leaders of the hunters came from the East to see it, they saw how tall it was, and how it was spreading out to the north and the south. And the awed leaders saw how grey it was, and how happily the highest bricklayers were working; for the highest bricklayers were making more money per hour than lawyers. So the leaders of the hunters went off by themselves and said, "We must

think about this wall, for once a wall is up on the outside, is one not also up on the inside?”

And so the nervous leaders returned east to their cities and said to their people, “Those fishermen and their bricklayers are doing much evil to us by building their wall. And they enjoy building it, for we have heard their laughter. And we must not think wrongly about their wall. We must not think that their wall will protect us from them, for already they stand atop their wall as they lay their grey bricks. And by standing tall, they can gaze a great distance into our land. And if their wall gets much taller, they will soon see all of our finest homes, and all of our precious farms, and all of our shiny few vehicles; indeed, they will see all of our culture’s creations. So if the men who gaze into our land should see all of these things, will their eyes not soon bulge with great evil, and will these men not soon pick up some bricks, and come after us in the night, and then strike us down, and at last leave us to rot in our very own streets?”

So the leaders of the hunters thought more deeply about the great grey wall. And when their pondering was over, they said, “Then we, too, will build a great wall—a wall greater than their own. That way, the fishermen will not be able to see all of our part of the globe. And we will see what their wall now hides.”

The leaders of the hunters also said, “They have been building a wall of grey bricks. So we will start a wall of bricks, too, for we are at least as strong as they. But we are not the *same* as they. And we will show them that indeed we are better, that we are not afraid of them nor their grey wall. So to show them that we are not afraid, we will paint our bricks a colour more striking than grey. By doing this, no matter how tall the two walls become, we will always boast the more striking wall.”

So the leaders of the hunters told their people that it was now time to build a black wall, for was a grey wall not a weak wall? And the leaders said to their brickpainters, “Do not bring the naturally grey bricks to where we will build our wall and then paint them black. Instead, paint them black in warehouses, and when the paint has dried, take them to our bricklayers.”

Then the leaders of the hunters told everyone in the East that it was now time to wear black shirts and black skirts and black hats and black pants—and even black shoes and black socks—for the leaders said that the summer would be cooler than usual. And black is a good colour to wear in the cool.

And when word of these big black plans reached the Western leaders of the great grey wall, they said secretly that yes, the black bricks would be more striking than their grey. But they also said that if their people were to learn of this, it would make their people unhappy. So to keep their people happy, these leaders of the fishermen said that there was too much white paint in their land. And they said that the white paint could best be used to coat the grey bricks of their wall. So in no time their bricklayers sloshed white paint down both sides of the great grey wall. And in no time the grey wall was bright white.

Then the leaders of the fishermen told everyone in the West that it was now time to wear white shirts and white skirts and white hats and white pants—and even white shoes and white socks—for the leaders said that the summer would be warmer than usual. And white is a good colour to wear in the heat.

But even as the Western leaders said these things, many strides to the east of the great white wall there kept on rising the great wall of black. And the leaders of the black wall smiled as the black bricks rose day by day and night by night to the sky.



And the men who laid the black bricks toiled more than those who laid the white, for the men who laid the black bricks aimed to reach and exceed the height of the white wall, while the men on the white wall, with their head start, had only to continue to keep their wall taller than the black.

And now as the black wall grew, its leaders became inspired. So the leaders thought of making a new flag—a black flag. But then they thought more deeply and decided that their hunters would not like an all-black flag. So the leaders decided to put some white symbols on their black flag—to show that it was a peaceful flag—to show that in the East, peace was strong in the wind.

And when word of the new flag reached the leaders of the white wall, they said secretly that yes, the design for the flag showed that the leaders of the black wall had some intelligence. But the leaders of the white wall told their fishermen that they would make a flag that was almost pure white—a flag of peace. But the leaders of the white wall did not tell their fishermen that they would put more black on this white flag than the other side had put white on its black. And only the leaders of the black wall would sense this insult.

And not only into their flags, but also into their bricks, did all of the leaders begin to inject their inspirations; for each brick that came to the walls was no longer the usual brick. The new bricks were the same size as the usual, but they were tougher and heavier. And the bricklayers strained themselves more with these new bricks. And each day's new bricks were a little heavier than those of the day before.

And as the summer began, the heights of the walls became very great. And the black wall became as tall as the white. And each wall stretched as far to the north and as far to the south as anyone's eyes could see. And soon the men working at the tops of the walls began to



lay bricks in the cold, for the walls were now almost mountaintop high.

And day by day, as the walls rose and rose, the people who lived in the towns near the walls became more and more afraid; for both of the walls rose so high that clouds would hide the tops of the walls for days at a time. And the townspeople thought that the bricklayers must be straining themselves more than ever; for how could a man work well with his head in the clouds?

And even when there were no clouds, the townspeople were still afraid; for in the sunlight, the walls cast great shadows on the towns. But the walls still kept growing.

And the bricklayers needed great skill to keep their balance on the top-heavy walls. But because the bricklayers worked with this skill and with pride—for such things were needed if a man was to feed his family—because the bricklayers worked so well, the walls soon reached the heights of mountaintops. And though it was summer, when raindrops fell on the towns, snowflakes fell on the tops of the walls. And the snow made the townspeople even more afraid, because they thought that the snow made the laying of bricks a slippery thing.

And in the East, when the winds gusted from the east—and in the West, when the winds gusted from the west—the townspeople would see how greatly and how grandly their snow-capped wall did sway. And if these winds were gusting when the sun was in the right spot, the shadows of the walls would race back and forth across the towns, and the people would gasp, for this was something wild and new. And the people saw that it was always the shadow of their own wall that darkened their towns.

So it was the great swaying of the walls and the frightening movements of the shadows that made the townspeople begin to dig deep holes for shelter, just in case, on the outskirts of their towns. And

in these holes, the people would soon place tents, canned food, water, seeds, spears, shovels, matches, torches, blankets, sleeping bags, winter clothing, and copies of all the great books of the world.

The people of each wall dug and said, “Our wall is unstable. What if there were a tornado? Or who could say what a great quake might do? Would our wall then come tumbling and crumbling down?”

So the townspeople felt they had good reasons to dig. And the holes that they dug and then blasted reached well beyond the depths of the deepest mines. And it would be warm in these holes year-round, for under the holes was the great heat of the core of the globe.

And as the midsummer drew near, the bricklayers kept laying their bricks. And the walls had now reached a height beyond that of the mountaintops, a height where there were rarely clouds and where the bricklayers wore cumbersome clothes to keep out the cold.

And now men had stopped bringing new bricks to the bases of the walls and no longer climbed ladders to the tops. Instead, both sides began to use quiet little whirlybirds that would appear on the horizon, approach loaded with the newest bricks, and then land on the tops of the walls.

And because the bricklayers were so high up, and because the shadows they cast were so great, no one on the ground could tell anymore what kinds of bricks they were laying.

And although the leaders of both sides were happy to see their little whirlybirds flying, they *were* concerned about the great swaying of the walls. So the leaders thought about the matter and decided that it was time to lay smaller and lighter bricks. But the bricks could be as tough as the leaders wished. And so with time the new bricks that were laid were almost as small as the cubes you might drop in your drink. And a whirlybird could carry many *little* bricks.

So the walls kept growing, and the swaying did not increase, because the little bricks were laid in the vast calm that was well above the globe. And within a few weeks the townspeople became used to the swaying of the walls and the movements of the shadows. And few of the townspeople gave much thought to the walls or to the holes that were warm and protective.

The hunters and the fishermen were happy. And each group still joked of the ways of the other.

And then one day, when the sun was high and there was not a cloud to be seen, the globe began to rumble—it began to quake.

And many of the townspeople rushed out into the streets and turned their heads to their wall. And some fell upon the ground and screamed, “No, please, no!” Mothers ran screaming through the streets with their crying children, racing for the holes. And others just stood still, began to tremble, and thought, “This is it. This is the end.”

And yes, the walls swayed greatly, and the bricks groaned, and some bricklayers fell to their deaths. But in a few more moments the quake stopped, the bricks stopped groaning, the people stopped screaming, and the sun kept shining.

And now no one knew whether the walls had proved their strength or whether the groaning meant they had been weakened. Yet for a few more weeks of summer, all was calm. The season passed pleasantly, and all of the people enjoyed their vacations. And about two things the leaders were right—in that part of the globe where the people wore white, the weather was warmer; and in that part of the globe where the people wore black, the weather was cooler.

And then came that day in the late summer when *it* happened.

The weather was sunny and mild, with only a light east wind, and it was time for the children to go back to school. But along the base of the great black wall, there began to fall powder from the bricks above.

And, here and there, bigger bits of brick pelted the ground. And then there appeared a great crack that began to run up the black wall. And all who saw it wanted to stop that crack.

But the crack had a life of its own; for in no time the bricks of the black wall began to groan and moan, and the noise could be heard all over the globe. It echoed from every mountaintop and rushed through every valley—yes, East, West, North, South—and so everyone was afraid.

And the hunters who stood near their cracked black wall could see that it was beginning to lean west toward the white. And they could see that their wall was likely to strike the other. But the people west of the white wall could not see the lean of the black.

And for the next few minutes, the leaning wall froze. Then there was a tremendous *boom*, and the black wall began to topple into the white. And so both walls began a great fall west—onto the land of the fishermen.

The bricks were coming down...coming down. The new bricks were coming—falling from great heights and spreading out above the land of the fishermen. But some of the new bricks did not look like bricks, for the bricklayers had been working in secret high above most of the clouds.

And whatever you might call these things, they flared and glared orange and burned as brightly as seven suns, and they boomed and roared like tornado thunder as they came falling through the atmosphere. They came not as bricks but as balls. They were fireballs. And as the fireballs boomed, blinded, and roared, nobody thought about hunting, fishing, vultures, or gulls.

And still the fireballs would not stop coming. They had been placed as bricks so high on the walls that they had to fall a great distance from the bases of the walls. And soon some little winged

cubes also began to fall across the doomed part of the globe, coming down like innocent parachutes. They were the new and special butterfly bricks that had been laid in secret. They became fireballs, too. And all over the West, down also came the top-secret flying dice. They exploded as fireballs and released unseen rays of woe.

And even as the fireballs were booming and blinding all over the land of the fishermen, the leaders of the fishermen were able to send messages to their people that the bricks were on their way, falling from great heights. And one message was “Hurry and take shelter underground, and do not look up or you will be blinded.”

And some people did take shelter in shallow hollows and in their basements. Yet they quickly roasted to death and turned into little pretty crystals that were salty, not sweet. But some fishermen and their families who lived in the towns near their wall did make it into their holes.

And still the bricks, the little winged cubes, and the wee dice kept booming and burning. The fireballs destroyed all of the fishermen’s houses and apartments. And more explosions blew away all of the schools, cottages, stores, and hospitals. The flames tore through the streets and burned to crystals the few people still alive and fleeing. And those bricks and cubes and dice that did not explode during their descent crushed themselves into dust when they struck the ground. And this dust was like the rising, choking, acrid dust from all of the ancient world’s volcanoes and more.

And when at last the two great walls had fallen upon the now-wretched part of the globe—the sad land of the fishermen—when at last all of the booming, the burning, and the screaming had stopped, the leaders of the victorious East, from the security of their untouched cities, said that this holocaust was the best thing that could happen as far as hunters and their families were concerned; for although it was

sad that billions had died, so many billions had not, and those billions were their fellow citizens—hunters and their families.

So the Eastern leaders said, “Let us now go into the beaten part of the globe. Let us go west and not do the fishermen’s land any more damage. But rather let us be friends to those who are left, and we will teach them our wise ways.”

But great clouds of dust that were greater than those from the ancient volcanoes were quickly blown to the East. And all of the people of the East, except leaders with masks and soldiers with masks, were smothered; for the people of the East had seen their great black wall falling away from them. They thought they would remain unscathed, and so they had not sought shelter.

But the deadly dust soon darkened the sun. And as the great winds of the world whooshed the dusty clouds all over the globe, the sun soon shone nowhere. And what had been day was soon night. And what had been night was now continuous night.

And as the masked winners marched west into the beaten part of the globe, they brought with them searchlights but they saw no survivors. And from what they could see, the victorious leaders said, “We must be careful, for their cities are now like their countryside, and their countryside is now like their cities; for nearly everything is nearly everywhere here in the West destroyed. And our maps—well—our maps are not maps anymore. And it is not good to be lost in the dark.”

But one leader who was also a scientist said, “It is dark, no doubt, but the dust is falling from the sky and settling. So the sun will shine again, though I suggest that it perhaps may take some time.” So the winners were happy to hear that one day the sun would return.

And although one day the sky might brighten, the happiness of the winners was short-lived; for the darkness lasted much too long, and



the searchlights were dimming. The winners also could find no good fish or big animals to eat, for the fireballs had boiled away many of the fishermen's waters. And nearly all of the few big animals had been burned to crystals or smothered—and the dead animals that still had bodies were rotting. And the waters that had been spared the heat of the fires were not spared the rains of the dust. So now the clear waters were cloudy and sick.

And the darkness that had spread around the globe soon cooled what used to be warm—the oceans, the great deserts, and the tropical forests. And soon it began to snow all over the world. It snowed on the stumps of palm trees. It snowed on the bodies of apes and orioles. And it was a dull, dusty snow. It was not the bright, glowing snow of a moonlit midnight. And you could not eat this snow, because it was like the salt of the sea; for to drink salt water was to thirst for more.

And not only did the snow stay dusty, but the sky stayed dark, the weather stayed cold, the snow piled up deep, and the winners were not ready for this.

Yet beneath the dust, the rubble, and the dusty drifts of snow, deep in the warm holes beneath the dreadful surface of the fishermen's land, some of the losers were still alive; for the dust had not reached down through the rubble to choke them, and the heat of the fireballs had not reached down that deep to roast them. And the losers did not know that the last of the winners were now dying in the dusty snow above.

No, the cold was too bitter for anyone. And it did not matter whether you wore black clothes or white.

And soon the last of the winners were frozen in the dusty snow; for they were like the frozen woolly mammoths of the far north—they were strong and walked tall but had extended their range too far.



And in the deep holes of the fishermen's land, the losers felt warm and protected. But as weeks passed, they began to run low on food and water; for the holes were not as well stocked as they should have been. So a few of the losers said, "We will not die down here. It is better to die on the surface than to die from deep down within."

So the losers came up to the top of their holes and forced aside the rubble, the dust, and the snow. But they then felt the bitter cold, saw the frozen winners, and breathed the falling dust, and they knew they could not stay on the surface. They quickly tasted the snow, and they could tell that snow as dusty as that was not for the quenching of thirst. So the losers shivered and returned to their holes.

And as the days passed, the losers in all but one hole ran out of water. And for a time these losers thirsted, and they tried again the dusty snow. But the snow had not changed. And soon these losers fainted. And soon these losers died.

But in the one hole where there was still water and food, one loser said, "Let us try this. Let us take some snow deep into our hole. There we will let the snow melt, for there we have much heat."

So the losers took their snow to the deeper part of their hole. And they let the heat of the core of the globe melt the snow. And from the melting of the snow there came dusty water. But the dusty water was too dusty to drink. So the losers said, "We will take this dusty water down to a level where few have gone before. We will go down to the deepest part of our hole, to a level where we may boil the water. But before we go down there, we will put some snow in our clothes so that we can stay cool in the steam."

So these things were done.

Then the losers said, "Now let us pile the snow here at the bottom of our hole. We will watch the snow melt and the dusty water boil, and the pure steam will settle as pure water on the walls of the hole. We

will then collect in our empty food cans the drops of water as they trickle down the walls. And we will keep putting snow in our clothes so that we can stay cool. And if we do all of these things, and if we can catch in our cans the water that was the steam, then when the cans are full, we will let them cool, and will we then not drink for ourselves pure water?"

And later some losers said, "Do you see the dusty mud that is left at the bottom of the boiling hole as the steam rises from the dusty water? Then when we think the surface of the globe is livable, let us get our shovels and scoop up the mud. Then let us take it up to the surface, and there we will build a great home of mud. We will build the home over the opening of our hole so that our mud home will stay warmer in the cold. And to strengthen the mud, we can add the bones of the frozen dead."

But another loser said, "If we build such a home, one day the rain will wash it away. Let us instead pitch the tents we have stored in our hole."

So every day—which was still night—the losers came up to the surface to see whether the dust had stopped falling. When at last it had, the losers came up out of their hole, and by torchlight they pitched their tents.

And so now the losers had shelter on the surface and a source of clean water in the depths of their hole. And in a few weeks the darkness brightened a bit. And the new light gave the losers new hope.

But the losers were still low on food, and it was now the fall, and they thought, "What will we do?"

So the losers thought deeper than the boiling bottom of their hole. They did not see how they could make food from water, nor from snow, nor from rubble. And so the losers said, "We have but a few days of food left, and we have no way of growing new food at this

time; for even if the sun were to shine brightly, it is now autumn, and there will not be enough time to grow anything for the winter. And we have walked far and have found nothing to eat. We have done all that we can.”

So the losers agreed that it was time to eat the winners. But eating them would take courage, for it was always a challenge to eat human flesh. Then a few of the losers said, “We do not want to do this, but we will do it; for it is the only way. And no harm will come to us if it is for the good of the living. And may we not be the last people alive on the globe?”

So the losers gathered a few of the frozen winners and took them down into the hole. And in the depths they roasted and sizzled the flesh.

And in a few more weeks the winter came. And although the losers were well fed in flesh, they were not well fed in fruit. Some got scurvy and three of them died. And the dead were left in distant snowdrifts.

And although it was winter, there was a good sign. The sun was now shining more brightly than it ever had since shortly after the fireballs. And from this fact, the losers suddenly thought deeply, and they said, “If we plant our stored fruit seeds now, in some warm mud in our hole, and if we let the light of some of our torches be their sun, then we can bring the season of spring to them. And didn’t some people once grow gardens in some deep mines?”

So the losers began fruit and vegetable gardens in their hole. And indeed the seeds sprouted and the seedlings flourished. And the losers said, “Why did we not think of whole gardens before?”

And many of the losers who used to play cards long before the fireballs struck began instead to read some of the great books of the world, and they were surprised to be comforted by what they called

the written power of God. And while many losers read the great books, the daylight lengthened and grew stronger. And the winter passed slowly, but at last the spring came!

And with the spring, the south-facing snowdrifts began to melt, so the losers said, "Let us dig some holes on the north sides of hills, and we will fill the holes with winners and snow. We will then have good frozen meat for the summer."

So the losers buried the winners in the freezing holes.

And as the spring became warmer and brighter, the losers rejoiced, and they used their shovels as ploughs. And in their fields they planted seeds and the vigorous, torch-grown seedlings. And the surrounding land sprouted other plants through the blanket of dust, and even the weather was as the losers prayed it would be.

And as the summer drew near, some losers began to venture beyond their fields. Now and then, a boy would spear a carp in a river. And, here and there, the losers would spot an animal.

And as the summer passed, the people tended their fields, took care of each other, and read about wisdom. And in the evenings they would sing together and look at the moon and the stars. And well before the summer was over, every loser had not only good meat but also good fruit and good vegetables. And only the very old died.

And as the years went by, the people had many children, and the new families began to spread across the reborn globe. The trees were getting taller, like the children. The rivers and streams were clearing. And there were more and more fish in some of the waters and more and more animals in some of the woods.

And many families chose to settle by the waters where there were fish, and the sunsets by the waters were beautiful. And other families headed east to settle in the woods by the distant mountains, and there the singing of the few songbirds was sweet.

And over the next one thousand years, the people of the waters and the people of the forests gradually kept to themselves, and most spent less time reading about wisdom. And in time the speech of many parents and children became poor. But a few folks were educated, though what they had learned was not wisdom. And they soon learned how to build walls of brick.

And with time indeed up started two brick walls close to each other, one belonging to the Western fishermen, the other to the Eastern hunters. They were the new walls of death.

But one woman, upon seeing the rising walls, consulted an old, musty book that only a few could read. And then this woman, who did not hunt and who did not fish, but who knew how to do both, went and spoke to the busy brick-laying hunters and fishermen. She told them that building walls of death might not be the best thing they could do. But the bricklayers on both walls said to the woman, “We bricklayers are not ancient people. We are not at all like *them*.”

And the woman, whose name was Sophia, said, “No, you are not ancient people, yet you still build walls, do you not?”

And then Sophia said, “Fishermen, I am your friend, and you are mine. Hunters, I am your friend, and you are mine. And though it may not seem so, I love you, hunters, and I love you, fishermen. And I see as much good in you as I see in my own special family. And gentlemen, I love my family dearly.”

And those to whom she spoke said, “That may be so, but what of it?”

And Sophia said, “Gentlemen, I have travelled throughout both of your lands. I know of your love for hunting and of your love for fishing. I see the greatness of your science and arts. And I see the warmth and the wisdom in the ancient writings of both hunter and fisherman. And I know that the heroes of the fisherman have been as

brave and as great as the heroes of the hunter. I also know that, in both of your lands, you work so that you may raise a happy family, and that by raising a happy family you may work more happily and play more joyfully. And it is because there are no great differences, gentlemen—it is because you truly are deep down *the same*—that you each build the same kind of wall.”

Sophia spoke on. She said, “Gentlemen, it is not my business to tell you what to do, and if I disturb you, well, that is my fault. But tell me, gentlemen, do we not listen to that which we wish to hear? Or, when our name is spoken, do we not turn our eyes to the speaker? Or, when you seek the love of a desirable woman and when you think all is lost she says, ‘I love you,’ do you then say, ‘You must be mistaken, my dear,’ or do you not instead take her in your arms and listen to hear more good things?”

“Then if you love listening to that woman, gentlemen, and if you listen because she says what you want to hear, then perhaps you will wish to hear this: Did you know there are many people all over the globe who wish to build up your spirits instead of your walls? And did you know there are many who wish you had used the time and energy you needed to build walls to instead build great buildings, sculpt great sculptures, do good deeds, and think great thoughts? And no doubt you have heard this question: ‘Do you not wish that words would stop what booms louder than words, for don’t words officially end wars?’”

“Now gentlemen,” Sophia continued, “I understand the fear of both sides: hunter of fisherman and fisherman of hunter. And you know of what fear I speak. It is the same kind of fear that a woman can have when she sees a snake and screams. For when that woman was a little girl, playing wild in a daisy field, a bad boy tossed a big snake at her, and she ran away and hid, for she was not yet ready to handle the snake for herself. And so forever she would hate all snakes,

even those that were small, harmless, and friendly. And yet forever she would love a special boy; for later, all *boys* would be friendly, yet what *snake* could knock on her door?”

For indeed:

I want to walk hand in hand with the world,  
To know that the loon still cries;  
And that all of the greats, dead or alive,  
Still dream with a gleam in their eyes.

And I have one more thought to disclose,  
And now the whole globe must be told:  
As sure as fire is hot and ice is cold,  
You are just a blue moon with the craters on hold.

“That, gentleman,” Sophia continued, “is a taste of the rarely read book that dwells deep in our hearts. But now, hear this story.”

“There were two great countries, one East and one West. And each was building a wall to outdo the other’s, and for many years work went along very well. And then one day a rich man who had friends in both countries said he would much rather embrace his friends than bow to a wall. So he told his friends to ask the leaders of the East and the leaders of the West to meet with him and talk about walls. Then he went and stood in the no-man’s-land between the two walls. And when his friends told the leaders about his request, the leaders balked at his idea. But since so many in the two countries liked the rich man, the leaders changed their minds and agreed to meet him in no-man’s-land.”

“And so the rich man met with the two leaders and said to them, ‘I just cannot see why such high walls are needed to separate such great



bricklayers. So should we now stop building walls? For is it wrong to say that greatness shared once is greatness earned twice?”

“But the leaders did not like to hear this saying, for it was hard to digest. And what was a leader if he could not lead?”

“So the rich man said, ‘It is one thing to be a good leader; it is another to be a good lover. Which is your true strength, loving or leading? Or could it not be both? For if you are a loving leader, do you not know that your words are heard more deeply, even long after your ashes are scattered by the wind, and might this not be good for your descendants? Hear me, leaders. You know that I am not a leader, perhaps just an overripe bleeder, and you will do with my words what you will. But whatever you do, please, do hear. Maybe one day, one day soon, you will gather all of your wisest and strongest, and then you might ask them how we can take down our walls. For it is true that all that rises must one day fall, like ocean to vapour to cloud—and cloud to rain to sea. Yes, let us take down the bricks from the walls, else our lives are but a living death.’”

““And perhaps those who are chosen to remove the bricks from the walls should choose to remove them carefully and considerately, for it has taken great work to build the walls. And so don’t the bricklayers and brickmakers whose skilled hands have fashioned the walls and the bricks—these people who have families to feed—don’t these people who have worked so hard to preserve the safety of their fellow citizens, the safety of their friends—don’t these people deserve respect for their efforts? So perhaps when at last the walls are brought down, they should at least be taken down slowly—brick by brick. And if, as you take down the bricks, the wallbuilders should say that they want to help you, shall we not let them help? And if we do not listen to what they have to say, they may think that no one has esteemed the hard work that they did to build their wall.’”

“To those slighted men it may be like having a woodsman cut down the tree that you as a child had planted in a barren playground in your neighbourhood, a tree that you had watered and watched grow healthily from the days of your youth, a tree that shaded you from the heat of the sun—but a tree that now is sick, whose leaves are no longer green, though you have done all you can for your tree. But if the woodsman can be kind, then, branch by branch, the sick tree may come down with dignity.”

“That, gentlemen,” Sophia continued, “is another selection from the unwritten book, a book open here to the thought of ‘the forever true.’”

And thus Sophia ended her story of the rich man, the walls, the tree, the woodsman, and the matter of the personal book. And although she was full of hope, she saw that the bricklayers still returned to their bricklaying. But she saw with joy that they laid their bricks more slowly. And so she said to herself, “I will always praise the personal book, for it is a true path to peace.”

But as of now, reader, it seems that most of our books are closed. And yet there is hope still. There are those who still smile, still laugh, still toast to wine and to song. And there in the playgrounds as the bombers roar by, the children still giggle and sway on the swings. Yes, summers to autumns and winters to springs—so on roll the great waves of life, all across and all around the great land.

And world, do you know?

That is how it shall be in the final days.

For in those days they will finally say,

“’Twas a great land that rolled out so softly and easily,  
a land awaiting, forever and at last, the end.”

∞  
∞ **THE END** ∞  
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